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California junior colleges are now required to provide special counseling for students with poor high school records and low scores on college placement tests. College of San Mateo identified these students and asked counselors to work with them as seemed appropriate and as time permitted. The purpose of this study was to see if early identification of these students helped them do better college work, compared with similar students from the preceding year who had not been identified. It set out to determine the difference, if any, in (1) the withdrawal rate of identified and unidentified students, (2) the dismissal or disqualification rate, (3) grade point averages, and (4) English grades. The comparison groups were 220 students from the 1966-67 year and 254 students identified for special counseling in the 1967-68 year. It was concluded that: (1) students identified for special counseling seemed to persist longer but, at the end of the year, there was no difference in retention rate between the identified and unidentified; (2) identified students attempted fewer units, but there was no evidence that grades increased as loads decreased; (3) grade point averages increased for both groups from fall to spring and English grades were the same over a full school year; and (4) since merely identifying these students does not increase their success potential, some specific program must still be worked out. (HH)

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COLLEGE OF SAN MATEO

RESEARCH REPORT

1968-7

IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH LOW ABILITY AS A MEANS TO IMPROVE THEIR POTENTIAL IN COLLEGE

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IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH LOW ABILITY AS A MEANS TO IMPROVE THEIR POTENTIAL IN COLLEGE

INTRODUCTION

California junior colleges have been required to provide special counseling for students selected under the provision of the California State Administrative Code, Section 13, Title 5. The apparent intention of this requirement is to increase the probability of success in college-level work for students with poor high school academic records and low performance on college placement tests. In this instance no additional resources have been provided to augment the already limited counseling services available at the colleges, nor has the nature of the special counseling been defined. Thus, at many institutions, such as College of San Mateo, these students have been identified only, and their names have been brought to the attention of the counselors. Counselors have been asked to work with these students in any way they deemed most appropriate and to the extent that the counselor's time permitted. In this way it was hoped that college success, reflected in academic achievement and persistence in college classes, of these students would be improved. This study examined the plausibility of such an assumption.

STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of identifying students with low ability as a means of assisting them to perform satisfactorily in their college work. That is, if one brings to the attention of counselors the names of their students whose apparent potential for

success in college seem minimal, will such students be any more successful in college than the same type of students from the preceding year who were not identified?

OBJECTIVES

1. To determine the differences, if any, in the withdrawal rate of the identified students and those not identified

2. To determine the differences, if any, in the number of identified students who have been dismissed or disqualified and the number of non-identified students in similar circumstances

3. To determine the differences between grade point averages of identified and non-identified students

4. To determine the differences, if any, between English grades earned by identified and non-identified students.

PROCEDURE

The population for this study consisted of all freshman students who upon entering College of San Mateo had maintained less than 2.00 grade point average during their last six terms in high school, who scored at or below the fifteenth percentile on the School and College Ability Tests (SCAT), and were placed in English 50A. Such students were considered "identified" when they entered College of San Mateo during the fall term of 1967, while those who entered CSM during the fall term of 1966 were considered non-identified. These two classes of students were considered representative of the population, with the 1966 students serving as a control group and the 1967 students serving as the treatment group.

The treatment in this instance was primarily an identification of students with the designated characteristics, which was accomplished by placing an orange dot on the student's folder. Counselors were urged to give the identified group of "orange dot" students as much time and attention as they could. Data were gathered through services provided by the computer center for the identified students, and information concerning those not identified was gathered by hand by personnel in the Registrar's office.

FINDINGS

There were 254 students identified for special counseling during the fall semester of 1967-68 school year, and 220 students who met the same criteria but were not identified during the fall semester 1966-67. A comparison of the two groups of students, in terms of retention, was provided through Table I. Of those students not identified approximately one in five withdrew before the beginning of the spring semester (22.2%), while nearly the same proportion of the identified students (20.8%) also withdrew before the start of the spring semester.

TABLE I - A Comparison of the Retention Rates Between 1966-67 Non-identified Students and 1967-68 Identified Students

	1966-67		1967-68	
Fall Semester	#	%	#	%
Started semester	220	100.0%	254	100.0%
Withdrew during semester	17	7.7	32	12.5
Completed semester	203	92.3	222	87.4
Withdrew between semesters	32	14.5	21	8.3
Disqualified, no petition	34	15.5	19	7.5
Disqualified but did not withdraw	12	5.5	14	5.5
Total disqualified	46	21.0	33	13.0
Total not retained	83	37.7	72	28.3
Spring Semester				
Students continuing from fall	149	67.7%	196	77.2
Fall withdrawals who re-enrolled	2	.9	8	3.1
Total started in spring	151	68.6	204	80.3
Withdrew during semester	17	7.7	26	10.2
Disqualified	39	17.8	52	20.5
Dismissed	2	.9	6	2.4
Total not retained	58	26.4	84	33.1
Total retained after one year	93	42.3	120	47.2

At the same time, the proportion of the 1966-67 students who were disqualified during the fall semester and then failed to petition to return for the spring semester was twice as high (15.5%) as the proportion of 1967-68 students (7.5%) who were disqualified in the fall semester and then failed to petition to return in the spring semester. Thus, the overall rate of retention for the fall semester was higher for the identified 1967-68 group than it was for the non-identified 1966-67 group. Apparently this higher retention rate for the 1967-68 students was the result of fewer disqualifications followed by the student withdrawing, since the withdrawal rate for both groups was the same.

Continuing to follow these students into the spring semester, it was noted that a higher proportion of the 1967-68 fall term withdrawals returned during the spring term than was the case for the 1966-67 students. However, during the spring semester the withdrawal, disqualification, and dismissal rate for students identified in 1967-68 was a little higher than the rate for the unidentified group in 1966-67. Nonetheless, the rate for the 1967-68 group did not increase enough to cause the total retention rate after one complete school year to drop below that of the 1966-67 group. In fact, the retention rate for the identified students (47.2%) was a little above that for the unidentified students (42.3%). However, this difference was not statistically significant and could have been accounted for by chance alone. For that matter, common sense suggested that the difference was too small to have any practical significance.

Further examination of this table shows that the withdrawal rate throughout the year for the non-identified 1966-67 students was 29.9 per cent, while it was 31.0 percent for the identified 1967-68 group. Moreover, the disqualification rate for the identified students over the year was 33.5 percent and 38.8 percent for the non-identified students. However, the dismissal rate for the 1966-67 students was 0.9 percent and for the 1967-68 students it was 2.4 percent. Essentially, these findings would indicate that the slight difference detected was due to fewer disqualifications among the 1967-68 students, while recognizing that the withdrawal and dismissal rates of the 1967-68 group were slightly above those of the 1966-67 group.

The group of unidentified students earned an average of 8.9 units out of an average of 10.9 units attempted during the fall, while the identified group earned 8.4 units out of an average of 10.1 units attempted. No difference was noted between the two groups of students during the fall or spring semesters in terms of units earned per units attempted. However, the non-identified students attempted an average of 11.5 units during the spring, while the identified students attempted an average of 9.2 units. Generally it has been assumed that the student's grade point average will increase as his unit load decreases. This would suggest that counselors did influence the student's unit load choice to a greater degree among the 1967-68 group than was the case in 1966-67. This practice had very little affect, however, on the student's grade point average.

The grade point average of the 1966-67 students during the fall semester was 1.61, and for the 1967-68 group a grade point average of 1.48 was earned. During the spring semester the grade point average of the 1966-67 students was 1.80, while the grade point average of the 1967-68 students was 1.54. Thus, both groups increased the grade point averages at nearly the same rate from the fall to the spring semester. Moreover, there were no differences between the two groups during either the fall or spring semesters in terms of their grade point averages.

Table II carried this examination an additional step by comparing the two groups in terms of grade point average per unit attempted. In addition, those students who withdrew or were disqualified during the fall semester were removed as a further refinement of the data. Inspection of the total column shows that there were no significant differences between the two groups regarding the number of units attempted. In terms of grade point averages, however, the 1967-68 group had 8 percent more students in the 1.5 or less GPA category, 3 percent less in the 1.6 to 1.9 GPA range, and 5 percent less in the 2.0 or more GPA range. In other words, the 1967-68 group had a higher proportion of students below a "C" average than did the 1966-67 group; but the differences were too small to be very meaningful.

TABLE II - A Comparison of Units Attempted and Grade Point Averages of Students During 1966 and 1967 Fall Semesters

Units Attempted	GPA 1.5 or Less #	%	GPA 1.6 to 1.9 #	%	GPA 2.0 or More #	%	Total Students #	%
			1966-67 Students--Non-identified					
1 - 3	4	7.4%	2	4.8%	4	7.5%	10	6.7%
4 - 6	7	13.0	1	2.4	5	9.4	13	8.7
7 - 9	5	9.3	4	9.5	10	18.9	19	12.8
10	4	7.4	4	9.5	2	3.8	10	6.7
11	8	14.8	4	9.5	8	15.1	20	13.5
12	9	16.7	2	4.8	2	3.8	13	8.7
13	5	9.3	6	14.3	5	9.4	16	10.7
14	6	11.0	12	28.5	4	7.5	22	14.7
15	5	9.3	6	14.3	10	18.9	21	14.1
16-plus	1	1.8	1	2.4	3	5.7	5	3.4
Total	54	100	42	100	53	100	149	100
			1967-68 Students--Identified					
1 - 3	10	11.5%	-	-	1	1.7%	11	5.6%
4 - 6	14	16.1	-	-	4	6.7	18	9.2
7 - 9	13	15.0	4	8.2	11	18.3	28	14.3
10	5	5.7	2	4.1	5	8.3	12	6.1
11	14	16.1	8	16.3	8	13.3	30	15.3
12	6	6.9	8	16.3	5	8.3	19	9.7
13	14	16.1	11	22.4	7	11.8	32	16.4
14	4	4.6	9	18.4	11	18.3	24	12.2
15	3	3.4	5	10.2	5	8.3	13	6.6
16-plus	4	4.6	2	4.1	3	5.0	9	4.6
Total	87	100	49	100	60	100	196	100

This table also suggests that enrolling in a small number of units is not an adequate condition for satisfactory grades. In fact, it would seem that students taking less than 6 units tend to earn the poorer grades in both the identified and the non-identified groups.

The final area of concern to this investigation was whether either group performed any better in English. Table III shows the number of letter grades earned during each semester by both groups.

TABLE III - A Comparison of Performance in English
During 1966-67 and 1967-68

GRADES	1966-67 #	1966-67 %	1967-68 #	1967-68 %
Fall Semester				
A	2	1.1%	4	1.9%
B	20	11.2	21	10.0
C	75	41.9	103	49.0
D	38	21.2	30	14.3
F	18	10.1	14	6.7
W	26	14.5	38	18.1
Total	179	100	210	100
Spring Semester				
A	2	1.9%	6	4.3%
B	12	11.4	18	12.9
C	55	52.4	40	28.5
D	15	14.3	39	27.9
F	9	8.6	15	10.7
W	12	11.4	22	15.7
Total	105	100	140	100

During the fall semester the students who entered during 1966-67 earned more "D" and "F" grades than the 1967-68 group, and they tended to withdraw from English classes at a slightly lower rate. This was also reflected in a slightly higher grade point average in English for the 1967-68 students (1.83 GPA) when compared to the performance of the 1966-67 students (1.67 GPA). However, during the spring semester this situation was reversed in that the 1966-67 group had a grade point average in English of 1.82 and the 1967-68 group earned an English GPA of 1.66. Once again, the withdrawal rate among the identified students was a little higher than among the non-identified group in 1966-67. The findings show no difference in achievement between the two groups, however, in English classes.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Students who are identified for special counseling are no more likely to stay in college than those who are not so identified. In effect, the rates of retention do not differ from one group to the other beyond that which could be accounted for by chance. The identified students do seem to withdraw at a higher rate during the semester, but at a lower rate between semesters. Moreover, identified students who withdraw during the semester are more likely to return the following semester; and identified students who are disqualified are more likely to petition than students who are not identified. It would seem that students who are identified for special counseling learn how to persist longer in college. Yet, by the end of the first year there is no difference in the rate of retention between those who are identified for special counseling and those who are not identified.

It should be noted that this study assumed that there should be some difference between the two groups in terms of the withdrawal rate. The lack of a difference cannot in itself be considered conclusive evidence that identification did not help these students. In some cases withdrawal may be the most appropriate action to take, and in other cases withdrawal is a poor solution. These two conditions may counteract one another so that the measure (withdrawal rate) is actually measuring several things at one time. It is a very gross measurement of human behavior and may show no difference when a difference really exists. As one examines the other findings and conclusions that follow, however, it is evident that the identification technique was of little value to those students with low ability.

2. Students identified for special counseling will attempt fewer units than students who are not identified. This in itself suggests that counselors had some affect on students unit loads by their activities, which may have included being able to meet more often with the "orange dot" students or being able to emphasize academic matters to a greater

degree than they had in the past. However, there is no evidence in the findings to support the underlying assumption that grades increase as the unit load decreases.

3. The grade point averages of students who were identified for special counseling are approximately the same as students who were not so identified. Moreover, both will increase their grade point averages at the same rate from the fall semester to the spring semester. It should also be noted that the proportion of students earning any given letter grade in English will be the same for both groups during the course of a full school year. Specifically, the identified students earned a higher proportion of "C" or better grades during the fall semester than the non-identified students, but during the spring semester the identified students earned a higher proportion of "D" and "F" grades than the non-identified students.

4. Simply identifying students will not materially enhance their success potential. In fact, it would appear that the same results could be achieved by doing nothing at all. Thus, if the College of San Mateo is actually committed to provide assistance for this segment of the student population, some specific program or action will need to be initiated. The recognition of a problem is of limited value unless something concrete is done to solve that problem.

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